

Fact Sheet

Educating Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Effective Program Components

There is consistent agreement across comprehensive intervention programs around several features. Most of the following features were primarily indicated for preschool programs (three through five years of age), and the features have been adjusted for older children and youth. Research on effective program components is rapidly expanding; policy makers and practitioners should review current research continuously.

1. Entry into intervention programs as soon as an autism spectrum disorder is seriously considered. Research has shown that appropriately trained professionals can reliably diagnose ASD by 24 months of age.
2. Children ages 24 months through 8 years should be actively engaged in intensive instructional programming for the equivalent of a full school day, 5 days a week, with full year programming varied according to the child's developmental and chronological level.
3. Repeated, planned teaching opportunities should be generally organized around relatively short periods of time for the youngest children (24 months-8 years), including sufficient amounts of adult attention in one-to-one or small group instruction to meet his or her individualized goals. Older children and adolescents should have planned teaching opportunities organized around increasing amounts of time on tasks, with attention to finding the maximum amount of time without stressing the child or youth.
4. Active family involvement, including parent training.
5. Low student/teacher ratios. For very young children, this may be one adult to two children. The ratio will vary with the developmental level and needs of older children and youth.
6. Mechanisms for ongoing program evaluation and assessments of the progress of children and youth, and mechanisms for altering programs when results indicate that need.
7. To the extent that it leads to educational goals specified on an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Program (IEP), for example, peer interaction; children and youth should receive specialized instruction in settings in which ongoing interactions occur with typical peers.
8. All instruction should support planned generalization of skills within typical environments.
9. All programs should include predictability and routine.
10. All programs should include supports during transitions between daily activities.